



Kenneth A. Gibson

MAYOR

NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

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CONTACTS: Bernard Moore, 733-3687, or
Douglas Eldridge, 733-6488

NEWARK PLANS MAJOR REVITALIZATION OF CULTURAL CENTER

Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson announced today (Friday, April 4) that the city government, business and labor have agreed to embark on a major rehabilitation and revitalization of Symphony Hall in Newark.

The scheduled improvements will include a complete interior repainting of the 3,365-seat auditorium, and repairs to the roof and air conditioning system. The city has already committed \$130,000 to the effort, and further funding is being sought.

The program to refurbish the city-owned center for the performing arts was announced by a spokesman for the Mayor during a gala benefit performance marking the start of a 50th anniversary celebration for Symphony Hall. The New Jersey Symphony, New Jersey State Opera, Garden State and New Jersey ballet companies, Newark Boys Chorus and Drinkard Ensemble performed at the "Celebration of the Performing Arts."

"Through a partnership with the business community and the labor unions," the Mayor said in a statement, "we expect that Symphony Hall will regain its rightful place as one of the finest cultural centers in the nation. We also expect Symphony Hall to be a focal point for the flowering of the arts in our community, and a keystone in the redevelopment of the historic Lincoln Park area."

Symphony Hall was bought by the City of Newark in 1965, and was last redecorated at that time. The city leases the building to Symphony Hall, Inc., which was organized by business and civic leaders to manage the facility.

In a recent move to assure the widest possible use of the hall, the city lowered its annual rent from \$5,000 to \$1 a year in a new lease for a five-year period. The new lease has been approved by Mayor Gibson and the City Council.

"Symphony Hall is a unique resource for our city, and it could not be replaced," the Mayor said. "By lowering the rent and directing some of our resources to this improvement program, we are demonstrating our whole-hearted commitment to a first-class cultural center for Newark."

The improvements announced by the Mayor include:

- The painting of the auditorium, lobby, dressing rooms and other interior areas, at a projected cost of \$58,715. The project has been arranged by the city's Office of Manpower and District Council 10 of the Painters Union.

- Repair and replacement of roofing and exit doors, at a total cost of \$41,000. This work was included in the city's 1974 capital budget, and bids have been taken already.

- Reconstruction of the air-conditioning system and replacement of about 25 per cent of the seats in the hall. The city's 1975 capital budget includes \$31,000 for this work.

The Mayor stressed that the rehabilitation work will not interfere with the normal use of Symphony Hall. All of the work is to be completed within a year.

The Greater Newark Chamber of Commerce has agreed to raise funds from the city's business community for the project, it was announced by David S. Rinsky, chamber president.

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Additional improvements may be planned with any proceeds from the gala benefit. All of the musical and dance groups donated their performances, and it was the first time they had all shared the stage in one evening.

Mayor Gibson, Gov. Brendan T. Byrne and Rep. Peter W. Rodino Jr., Dem.-10th District, served as honorary co-chairmen of the event. Robert W. Kleinert, president of New Jersey Bell Telephone Co., was chairman, and Clarence Reisen serves as chairman of the Symphony Hall Board of Trustees.

Kleinert said the event shows that "New Jersey doesn't have to live in the shadow of New York -- not in any respect, and certainly not in the arts."

The Mayor said the city hopes that a number of public buildings and parks can be cleaned and redecorated in time for the 1976 Bicentennial. Earlier in the day, the Mayor and the Governor had participated in ceremonies opening Newark's participation in the nation's 200th anniversary celebration.

The repainting and cleaning of Symphony Hall will include everything except the dome, which would require special scaffolding. The work will be done by a journeyman painter and four union trainees.

Symphony Hall was built in 1925 at a cost of \$2.2 million, and would cost more than \$20 million to replace today. It served originally as the Salaam Temple of the Shriners, and was known for many years as the Mosque Theater.

Through the years many of the world's outstanding orchestras, dance troupes and soloists have appeared in the Symphony Hall stage. The building was taken over by the city in 1965 at a cost of \$240,000.

Symphony Hall also contains the Terrace Ballroom and the studios of WNJU-TV (Channel 47). The manager of the building is Ms. Brenda Saunders.